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SUBJECT: SPAIN PREPARES FOR EU CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM

11. SUMMARY. On February 20, Spain will become the first EU country to put the European Constitution to a popular referendum. Because of support from both the governing Socialist party and the opposition Popular Party (PP), there is little doubt that a "yes" vote will win. Many in Spain see Spain's 1986 entry into the European Union as the catalyst for unprecedented economic growth and the solidifying of a young democracy. Since 1986, Spain has pocketed more than 85 billion euros (USD 110 billion) in EU assistance. Voter education and participation are key concerns of the GOS; a low turnout could signal a lack of faith in the Constitution and weaken momentum in support of the referendum in other countries. The GOS is in the middle of an extensive publicity campaign that is designed to inform the population about the benefits of a "yes" vote.

12. Spain's strong pro-Europeanism virtually assures a "yes" vote, but voter turnout will help determine if the vote is an unqualified success. The lack of controversy in the debate has added an element of voter apathy that the GOS is trying hard to combat through the star power of appearances of celebrities and world leaders to stump for the referendum. Divisive issues in other EU nations such as immigration or the accession of Turkey into the EU have been absent from the debate. The Zapatero government seems to have successfully marketed the referendum on the EU Constitution as a referendum on the EU rather than the Constitution. A strong turnout will likely reward his gamble to be the "first in Europe" and help shore up his political support. A low turnout will not necessarily tarnish Zapatero's image, but will likely slow the momentum of enthusiasm for the European project. END SUMMARY.

//EUROPE'S EYES WILL BE ON SPAIN//

13. Much of Europe is awaiting the first popular test of the European Constitution in Spain on February 20. The parliaments of Lithuania, Hungary, and Slovenia have all ratified the constitution, but Spain will be the first nation to have a referendum. President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero noted that "Europe's eyes will be on Spain" as it votes. The early referendum vote is just the latest example of the current government's emphasis of orienting its foreign policy towards Europe, though the PP also strongly backs a "yes" vote despite its more transatlantic outlook. Officials in the GOS see the referendum as Spain's contribution to the further integration of Europe. During a visit by European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso on February 7, Zapatero said, "Europe has helped Spain a lot and that's why we want to be the first to return the help...in a referendum."

//THE GOVERNMENT IS AGGRESSIVELY PROMOTING THE CONSTITUTION//

14. On January 7, the GOS launched a 10 million euro (USD 12.8 million) voter education campaign that included the distribution of six million copies of the European Constitution, thousands of posters, numerous advertisements via television, radio, and newspapers, rallies at Spanish League soccer games, and even the distribution of 230,000 "Referendum plus" energy drinks to young people. From February 4 to 18 the GOS has organized an aggressive political campaign to promote the benefits of a "yes" vote for Spain. EC President Barroso stumped for the constitution during a February 2 appearance in Spain, and emphasized the vote's importance by saying, "This referendum is important for Spain, but it's also very important for Europe. Its result will obviously influence the ratification process in the other member states." Zapatero will appear at a February 11 Barcelona rally in favor of the Constitution with French President Jacques Chirac.

//CAMPAIGN LITERATURE EMPHASIZES EU'S BENEFITS TO SPAIN//

15. All of the campaign literature emphasizes how Spain can influence the rest of Europe by sending a clear message of Spain's support for the Constitution. Spain has had extraordinary economic and political development since its entry into the EU in 1986. According to the literature, the EU has allowed Spain "to consolidate our democracy, experience unprecedented economic growth, and better our social and territorial cohesion" by allowing "Spanish to circulate, study, work, and live freely in a Europe without frontiers." Spain has been a net beneficiary of approximately USD 80 billion in EU transfer payments and thanks to the economic contributions of the EU, Spain has improved its highways, agriculture, and universities. Survey

results from a November 2004 study by the Elcano Royal Institute of International and Strategic Studies reinforce the strong pro-Europeanism found in the marketing campaign; according to the study, 58 percent of Spaniards say the EU Constitution is good for Europe, 75 percent believe the treaty is a step forward in the process of integration, and 55 percent believe the treaty is good for Spain.

16. Beyond being just an economic union, the future EU with its new Constitution "will proclaim its ambition to be a democratic political community based on common values and the concept of the European citizen." Three grand dimensions are emphasized in the marketing campaign--efficiency, democracy, and solidarity. An efficient new voting system, the streamlining of laws and regulations, and a permanent presidency and single Minister of Foreign Affairs are all seen as adding to efficiency. The foundation of the values of human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, and the respect for human rights are all seen as enhancing democracy. Some left wing politicians have presented the EU Constitution as necessary to allow the EU to become a counterbalance to the US. The new treaty proclaims the promotion of political cohesion, social rights, and a solidarity clause that states that member states will act together in the event of a terrorist attack or a natural disaster that affects one of its members

//MANY DO NOT KNOW CONSTITUTION'S CONTENTS//

17. Most Spaniards support the EU Constitution, but few seem to understand it. The Elcano Royal Institute study found that 84 percent of Spaniards asserted that they did not know the content of the Constitution and nearly one out of two Spaniards (44 percent) did not even know the position of their political party with regards to the treaty. A February 2 poll by Spanish national radio station Cadena Ser shows that 87.2 percent of Spaniards know little or nothing about the content of the Constitution. The same poll shows that 40.4 percent of Spaniards favor a "yes" vote, 6.5 percent favor a "no" vote, 10.9 percent would abstain, and 38.0 percent do not know which way they would vote. A Eurobarometer poll conducted during November stated that 56 percent of Spaniards are in favor of the Constitution, while 7 percent of the population opposes it. Support for the Constitution has been over 80 percent in all surveys that force respondents to choose between "yes" and "no" and don't allow for the option of "don't know," abstaining, or turning in a blank ballot.

//TURNOUT WILL BE IMPORTANT//

18. If voters stay away from the referendum vote, there could be trouble ahead for Zapatero's government. He has staked much of his reputation on obtaining a "yes" vote, and a low turnout could signal a lack of voter interest in European institutions. Turnout is expected to be less than 50 percent of the population. A greater than 40 percent turnout is expected by some members of the GOS, although the GOS does not have an official position on what constitutes a good turnout. GOS Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said that he would consider a turnout below 40 percent a failure, essentially setting a minimum target for voter turnout. Enrique Baron, the leader of the Spanish Socialists in the European Parliament, stated on February 9 that he felt a 40 percent participation rate would be judged successful. According to the November Eurobarometer poll, 36 percent of Spaniards say they will definitely vote. The next week of the political campaign will be crucial to ensure that turnout increases. Spain does have a recent history of referenda, with the 1978 referendum on the Spanish Constitution and the 1986 referendum to join NATO. Fifty-six percent of Spaniards voted in the 1986 NATO referendum, but members of the Spanish government are cautioning that the high voter participation in 1986 was due to the positive feelings of Spain's entry into both the EU and NATO within a short period of time. During a EU Constitution roundtable on February 10, European Commissioner for Economic Affairs Joaquin Almunia emphasized that referendum votes always have lower turnout than parliamentary elections and that the turnout should not be expected to reach levels anywhere near the turnout for the March 14, 2004 national elections.

//MOST POLITICAL PARTIES BACK CONSTITUTION//

19. Zapatero's Socialist Party, the main opposition PP, the Convergence and Union Party (CiU), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), and the Canarian Coalition have all asked their members to vote "yes" on February 20. The government of Jose Maria Aznar had opposed elements of the Constitution during the drafting process, particularly the loss of Spain's voting power due to the double qualified majority that was being considered for the text. The PP's new leader, Mariano Rajoy, has told party members that voting "yes" is far more important for Europe than punishing Zapatero is for the PP. Some individual members of the PP worry about the loss of sovereignty and a dilution of Spain's voting power in the EU,

but the overwhelming majority of members believe that Spain's membership in the EU has had tremendous economic and political benefits. Both the Socialists and the PP also believe that the Constitution will strengthen Spanish unity in the wake of several regionalist challenges to the power of the central government, including the Basque-proposed Ibarretxe Plan for greater regional autonomy. Many prominent members of the business community, and several well-known actors and writers have also stumped for the Constitution.

10. A small number of groups have lobbied against the EU Constitution. Political opposition has come from the United Left (IU) and the Catalan Republican Left (ERC). Gaspar Llamazares, the leader of the United Left, has been campaigning against the treaty because he believes the text is "neoliberal and democratically deficient" and "places Europe on the same road as the United States, by Americanizing Europe's political life." The IU has attacked Zapatero for openly supporting a "yes" vote rather than recusing himself from the debate. The ERC has been outspoken in its opposition to the treaty, claiming that it prevents greater regional autonomy and doesn't show enough respect for the diverse nationalities of Europe. The Basque terrorist group ETA and its political wing Batasuna have also urged Spaniards to vote "no" in the referendum because the treaty does not recognize the rights of Basques as a nation.

11. The Catholic Church issued a statement on February 4 that it neither agrees or disagrees with the Constitution. The Spanish Episcopal Conference (CEE) was in favor of the goals of European integration and the consolidation of peace in Europe, but "the bishops would like to have seen a defined and unambiguous law on the right to life" as well as "greater protection of marriage and the family." Zapatero criticized the statement for saying that a "no" vote, an abstention, and a blank ballot were all as legitimate as a "yes" vote.

//TURNOUT KEY//

12. COMMENT. Spain has clearly benefited from its membership in the EU. Since 1986, Spain has pocketed more than 85 billion euros (USD 110 billion) in EU assistance. Support for the EU spreads across the political spectrum. Some have criticized the government's education campaign by saying that there is not enough time to adequately inform the population. Former President Felipe Gonzalez, a staunch supporter of the EU and the Constitution, said that the GOS should have approved the EU Constitution through a parliamentary ratification rather than a referendum, since a low turnout for a referendum would run the danger of causing a loss of momentum in other EU countries towards further integration; his view is important, as he was the architect of the 1986 NATO referendum.

13. Spain's strong pro-Europeanism virtually assures a "yes" vote, but voter turnout will help determine if the vote is an unqualified success. The lack of controversy in the debate has added an element of voter apathy that the GOS is trying hard to combat through the star power of appearances of celebrities and world leaders to stump for the referendum. Divisive issues in other EU nations such as immigration or the accession of Turkey into the EU have been absent from the debate. The Zapatero government seems to have successfully marketed the referendum on the EU Constitution as a referendum on the EU rather than the Constitution. A strong turnout will likely reward his gamble to be the "first in Europe" and help shore up his political support. A low turnout will not necessarily tarnish Zapatero's image, but will likely slow the momentum of enthusiasm for the European project.

MANZANARES